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ABSTRACT

A conversation with William Labov in September 1970, is the basis of this paper. Labov, who is working on a new theory of language which essentially makes style the function of grammar, divides linguistic description into the following five interrelated segments: semantic network, oriented semantic network, lexicalization, grammaticalization, and phonologization. Descriptions of these terms and their functions are given. (TS)

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Stanley E. Legum

ABSTRACT

Labov is working on a new theory of language which essentially makes style the function of grammar. The following is based on a conversation with him during the first week in September, 1970.

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ON THE FACTS OF THE LANGUAGE IN QUESTION OR A CONVERSATION WITH W. LABOV

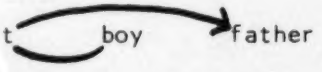
Labov is working on a new theory of language which essentially makes style the function of grammar. Nothing is written down yet, but since Labov's motto is "If it's not published, it doesn't count," I have no doubt he'll get around to it.[1] The following is based on a conversation I had with him during the first week in September, 1970. In brief, he theorizes that one can (and in multilingual situations does) communicate by simply saying the content words. Labov feels that a theory of language must account for both the systematic and the random aspects of language. He divides linguistic description into five (inter-related) segments: Semantic Network, Oriented Semantic Network (I suppose there is an "orientation component"), Lexicalization, Grammaticalization, and Phonologization.

The function of the grammaticalization component is to throw in the function words and other niceties which make an utterance sound smooth. Thus a production model starts with a semantic network which is a connection of content words connected by lines. So far Labov only talks about two kinds of lines, "object relations" and others. For example the following sequence shows a verb-object relation between hurt and father:

boy ——— hurt ———→ father

Co-reference problems are sidestepped by simply drawing more than one line from the appropriate noun.

By some mysterious means (perhaps Labov plans to work on this one), the semantic network is put in some linear order and becomes an oriented semantic network. As I understand him, Labov considers this to be a psychological matter more than a grammatical matter. He would allow any of the six possible orderings of the above semantic network. Thus the ordering:



is a legitimate oriented semantic network and would give rise to some such sentence as: The hurting was done by the boy to his father.

After (or maybe simultaneously) the orientation of the semantic network lexicalization takes place. Labov has not made this clear to me, but I assume he considers the semantic networks to be made up of features up until this point. After this the grammar or grammaticalization component takes over to supply the mysteriously appearing words in the

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[1] C-J. N. Bailey writes that a theoretical article by Labov will appear in the October issue of the University of Hawaii's *Working Papers in Linguistics*.

last example. Phonologization then takes place a la Sound Patterns. Grammaticalization also provides labeled bracketings so that the phonology will have something to work on. I believe that Labov wants to claim that there are no more instances of nouns crossing over co-referential nours.

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